

Patched together

THE RUSSIAN NAVY: Myth and Reality

By Eric Morris.
Hamish Hamilton. 162 pages.
£5.95.

The rise of Russian naval power over the past 15 years is the most spectacular single strategic event—at least among conventional forces—since the second world war. But to say spectacular is not necessarily to say significant. Neither the screechings of the right nor the pooh-poohings of the left about the Russian navy's significance are wholly convincing. Both use more or less the same sets of numbers to buttress their arguments. But numbers alone, as the American navy's most articulate strategist, Admiral Stansfield Turner (now director of the CIA), has pointed out, "fail to tell us what we want to know".

Mr Eric Morris, a civilian lecturer at Sandhurst, has produced a sensible and reasonable book to try to get at what "we want to know" through the process of historical analysis. His conclusions are that while the Russian navy has indeed grown and changed its immediate tasks, its long-term mission is fundamentally what it has always been—home defence—and it poses no real threat to the West, even with its new hybrid cruiser-carriers of the *Kuril* class. He sees the Russian navy not as having developed according to a grand plan to gain sea superiority, but as patched together according to what its leaders saw as short-term strategic necessities. And he clearly believes they have got a lot wrong.

There are two problems with the book, which, unfortunately, may put a lot of people off. First, Mr Morris falls into the trap that many of the "numbers" people do when he talks about submarines with long range missiles as if they are really part of navies. They in fact have very little to do with sea power. They are part of global power, and neither threaten nor are much threatened by the other elements of sea power. Mixing these up with navies proper confuses his otherwise interesting and challenging assessments of Russian naval strength. The second drawback is a number of editorial mistakes. (One, for example, says that Russia based a Polaris submarine at Rota, Spain, in 1967-71.) In spite of the flaws, Mr Morris has produced a good solid book.

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